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STATE TO TRANSITION STUDENTS AT INDIANA SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' CHILDREN'S HOME TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INDIANAPOLIS---The Indiana State Department of Health today announced plans to transition students at the Indiana Soldiers' and Sailor's Children's Home in Knightstown, Indiana to community-based school corporations after the conclusion of the spring semester in May.

The decision was made after a comprehensive, three-year evaluation and assessment of the Home. In fiscal year 2008, the state spent more than \$10.2 million to operate the Home, which served 185 students, with an average cost per child per day of \$249.88. Over the past nine school years, the ISTEP scores at the Home have consistently been well below the state average.

The Home was established to serve as a state residential school and home for Indiana children who are in need of care and education, with preference given to children of members of the armed forces and veterans. The Home currently has 114 students in grades 5 to 12, with an anticipated graduating class of 18 for 2009. Based on the three-year assessment, State Health Commissioner Judy Monroe, M.D. says the Home cannot properly meet the needs of the students.

"The assessment of the Home showed this is not a personnel problem, but instead, good people trying to work with a broken system," said Dr. Monroe. "We believe the best option for these young people is to keep them close to their families and in schools and communities that are better equipped to address their needs through community-based resources."

The three-year assessment, which incorporated evaluations by the Department of Education, the Family and Social Services Administration, the Indiana Office of Management and Budget, and architectural contractors, found the Home:

- Lacks a clear mission and admission policies;
- Fails to follow the preferred model and trend of supplying education and support to students in local communities, with the help of families, non-profit organizations, and local resources;
- Is inefficient in both its teacher to student ratio (1:5) and in the cost of educating students (\$91,205 per student, per year); and
- Has many physical facilities that are outdated and would cost between \$65 million to \$200 million to modernize.

"The Home will remain open until May 2009, as the Indiana State Department of Health implements a safe, professional, and thoughtful transition plan that takes into careful consideration the needs of the students and their families," said Lance Rhodes, assistant commissioner for Human Health and Operational Services at the State Department of Health.

In 1865, the Home was privately founded to provide care and education for orphaned and destitute children of Civil War Union Army veterans. In 1867, the state assumed control of the Home. In the late 1890's, concern for the Home's future grew because the number of Civil War veterans' orphans was dwindling, so the Indiana General Assembly amended the law to include destitute children of all servicemen. Originally named the Indiana Soldiers' and Seamen's Home, it was renamed the Indiana Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's Home in 1929.

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